

US modifies Ebola guidelines after quarantine uproar

October 28 2014, by Kerry Sheridan, With Jacey Fortin In Nairobi

US health authorities on Monday issued new guidelines for health workers returning from Ebola-hit nations after a firestorm of criticism over state quarantine restrictions, including from the UN chief.

The enforced quarantine in New Jersey of a US nurse who had come home after treating patients in Sierra Leone sparked controversy—and accusations from the woman that her rights had been violated.

The nurse was discharged on Monday, one day after New York eased strict new quarantine rules under pressure from President Barack Obama's administration.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Monday urged active monitoring of those at risk following stints in the countries hardest hit by the epidemic—Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

"Active direct monitoring" means high-risk people must be checked for fever daily for 21 days, and must restrict their travel and public activities for the duration of the virus's incubation period, the CDC said, in an update of previous guidelines.

Those at high risk include those who experienced needle sticks, handled bodily fluids of Ebola patients without protective gear or who handled the corpse of a victim, among others.

"That, we think, is good sound [public health policy](#)," CDC chief Tom

Frieden told reporters.

"We are concerned about some policies that we have seen in various places that might have the effect of increasing stigma or creating false impressions. You don't catch Ebola from someone who is not sick."

'Supported, not stigmatized'

The new guidelines—which the CDC does not have the power to enforce on a national level—stop short of a strict quarantine.

That is the standard New Jersey and New York states had adopted, following the first confirmed case of the disease in New York—a doctor who had treated patients in Guinea.

Those measures drew criticism from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and in Washington.

"Returning health workers are exceptional people who are giving of themselves for humanity," Ban said.

"They should not be subjected to restrictions that are not based on science. Those who develop infections should be supported, not stigmatized."

"We depend on them to fight this battle," Ban said in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, which is home to the African Union headquarters.

West Africa is the epicenter of the Ebola outbreak that has so far claimed the lives of nearly 5,000 people, according to the World Health Organization.

Several countries have imposed tough migration [restrictions](#) on visitors

coming from affected nations.

The European Union's new Ebola czar, Christos Stylianides, said tens of thousands of health care workers are needed to combat the deadly virus, including both volunteers in affected countries and foreign experts.

The White House also weighed in Monday, saying [health workers](#) like the New Jersey nurse, Kaci Hickox, should be praised.

"Her service and commitment to this cause is something that should be honored and respected, and I don't think we do that by making her live in a tent for two or three days," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said.

On Friday, Hickox was isolated in a tent outside the main hospital building at Newark International Airport in New Jersey with no shower or flush toilet and made to wear paper scrubs.

"I feel like my basic human rights have been violated," Hickox said Sunday, insisting she had shown no symptoms and tested negative for the disease.

She was discharged on Monday and was to taken to her home state of Maine by private—not public—transport.

'We all need to do more'

African Union chief Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who toured Ebola-hit nations last week and met Ban on Monday, called for efforts to be boosted to tackle the virus.

"Our strength is solidarity, and we must therefore continue to work together," she told reporters. "We all need to do more."

More than 10,000 people have contracted the virus in west Africa, according to the latest WHO figures.

Another country in the region, Mali, is scrambling to prevent a wider outbreak after a two-year-old girl died from the virus following a 1,000-kilometre (600-mile) bus ride from Guinea.

She was Mali's first recorded case of the disease.

In the town where the girl lives, Kayes, panic has set in, with some fleeing their homes Monday amid rumors of two new infections.

"I'm going to wait a few more days before sending my kids back to school," said Oumar Fofana, a banker who worried about the large movement of people in and out of the region.

Ebola is spread through close contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person. No widely available medicine or vaccine exists.

US troops returning from west Africa were quarantined at a base in Italy as a preventative measure "out of an abundance of caution," a Pentagon spokesman said Monday.

There are now 700 US troops in west Africa—including nearly 600 in Liberia and 100 in Senegal—with the force due to grow to at least 3,200 troops in coming weeks.

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